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ABSTRACT

At present, departments of communication do not have the same political status as other college departments, even though they provide more than their share of tuition revenue. To establish themselves as a viable political force, departments of communication must create an observable impact on the daily operating procedure of other academic programs. A curricular model of "structured breadth," requiring far more concentration in academic areas and allowing fewer electives, produces graduates who are both better educated and better prepared for the job market. At the same time, departments of communication gain political benefits: other departments are genuinely concerned to meet the needs of communication majors and to maintain the future health of the department of communication, while communication majors become more familiar with other academic programs. Thus students are provided with broad based preparation, while the department ensures its own political survival. (JL)

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"The Politics of Survival at Home: Bargaining Power on Campus"

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"The Politics of Survival at Home: Bargaining Power on Campus"

Ten years of service as a Department Chairperson--four years in a state, public university and the past six in a private, Catholic university--have caused me to find myself locked in political struggles on numerous occasions with assorted intra-campus administrative units. As you might guess, I've won a few and lost my fair share, too.

During several past conventions of the Speech Communication Association, as well as Central States, I have attended many programs and workshops sponsored by the Association for Communication Administration--very excellent sessions designed to share administrative concerns and to equip novice department administrators with knowledge and skills to render them effective in their human organizations. Almost uniformly, though, I have noted that while we are quite adept at sharing our plans of action for personnel evaluation, basic course administration, reaching the nontraditional student, coping with hundreds of majors with no faculty, etc., etc., we have generally stopped short of overtly dealing with that thing we pretend doesn't exist-but in our heart know certainly does--campus politics. In fact, we seem reluctant to even utter the word. For some reason we in higher education appear to have an aversion to confronting the fact that our daily existence occurs in one of the most politicized of all organizations--the contemporary American college or university.

This paper calls for a realization of the necessity for Departments of Communication to establish themselves as viable political forces in the campus organization. A model will be offered which for twelve years has effectively established a sound political power base for at least one Department. I am well aware that, as with any model, the suggested plan will not work in all University

settings. Internal restrictions and iron-clad core curricula could make implementation of this plan impossible. The concept, though, to whatever degree possible, is worthy of consideration.

Need For Enhanced Political Status

What immediately follows are three generalizations arrived at inductively over a period of ten years. You might allow me the privilege of generalizing, or, if you prefer, you may attribute these points as typical of a ten year administrator in higher education who has, through experience, become adept at using every reasoning fallacy known to civilized man.

Generalization #1: <u>On many campuses, Departments of Communication do not enjoy an inherently equal position with other disciplines in the campus political schema</u>.

We have known for years that people don't understand us--they don't know what we are "about." Most of our Deans, Vice-Presidents, and fellow Department chairs probably had a public speaking course which they hated. In many cases we are tolerated because there must be a few programs somewhere in the university which can turn admissions office freshman numbers and, at the same time, retain students with an acceptable grade point average. The result of the attitudinal difficulty many of us face is that we suffer when we enter into a political struggle. In short, all too often we are not taken seriously as a credible academic discipline.

Generalization #2: <u>On most campuses Departments of Communication provide more than their proportionate share of tuition revenue to the general fund</u>.

While we may not have the "respectability" in the eyes of our learned colleagues, we do have the numbers. There is little need for development of this point. There are few Departments of Communication in the country today with number problems. Our more common problem is in serving our majors with resources which have been allowed to fall far behind our growth rate.

Generalization #3: <u>If we are to achieve equal elbow space at the table politic on our campuses, we must create an obvious need for our existence</u>.

Such a need must have roots in something other than a basic course taught by T.A.'s--a course which many of our colleagues from other disciplines wouldn't miss if it were suddenly and mysteriously swallowed into the bowels of the earth. Our need for existence as perceived by others must also be rooted in something other than mere cash flow into the general fund. In short, our need for existence must result from observable impact on the daily operating procedure of the various other academic programs in the University.

For far too long we have filled the role of <u>providers</u> of service to academic units on campus. By referring to our basic course or courses as our "bread and butter," we have convinced other departments that, if it were not for them, our very heart beat in campus life would be threatened. We have effectively placed ourselves at the mercy of departments and curriculum committees--or, more directly, when was the last time you had to defend oral communication as a basic skill--if it is considered basic on your campus at all? The end result of such a situation has been a weak political stance. Far too often we exist in constant fear and trepidation of "losing" a requirement.

My basic contention is that we are missing the boat. The political table must and can be turned. Most of us have great numbers of majors who themselves need to be served. Our attention has been focused for too long on the

intra-departmental needs of our majors. This paper argues for a method of creating a significant impact on the academic life of other departments on campus--and, at the same time, proposes a curricular model which is clearly in the best academic interests of our students.

Educational Justification For The Model

Implementation of the model described here is possible through careful structuring of what is often referred to as general education requirements, breadth requirements, or breadth electives. The end result of such careful structuring is likely to be a program far more rigid and less flexible than for any other major in your university. Lest I be accused of exploiting my own majors for political gain on campus, a justification for a structured breadth distribution is in order.

1) Communication majors face a highly competitive entry level job market. In the professional areas such as broadcasting, film, applied communication, journalism, public relations, theatre, etc., it is sometimes nearly impossible for a specialist to break the market. More and more frequently our graduates gain their first employment in a Communication field based on solid cores of preparation in other, related fields. For instance we find that a journalist is employed on the basis of a political science, photography, or marketing minor; a broadcasting major enters the field via sales; a future Public Relations practitioner is employed due to a preparation in Commercial Design or an organizational communication student is selected because of a strong concentration in Management.

2) The growing area of Applied Communication requires that our students know something of those fields to which they are to apply Communication. If our graduates are to function as political communicators, health communicators, family communicators, or business communicators, it behooves us to direct them to solid concentrations in areas such as history, political science, natural sciences, psychology, sociology, economics, marketing, or management. If we are to be certain of such preparation for our graduates, it is up to us to abandon the free elective concept of hours in areas such as humanities and social sciences and to require solid blocs of courses in academic disciplines within those broader categories.

The Curricular Model

The Department of Communication Arts at the University of Dayton is firmly rooted in the very large College of Arts and Sciences. A Communication Arts major must meet the following minimum requirements to be certified for graduation by the college:

Major Program	36 semester hours
English Composition	7 semester hours
Philosophy/Religion	12 semester hours
Natural Science/Math	7 semester hours
Social/Behavioral Science Electives	12 semester hours
Humanities Electives	18 semester hours
Free Electives	28 semester hours

As a Department prerogative we have chosen to apply structure in the areas of social and behavioral Science electives, humanities electives, and free electives. In addition to fully satisfying the College graduation requirements,

such structure offers two distinct advantages: First, we graduate truly broadly and liberally educated communicators, and, second, our 700 majors impact on the academic life of every other Department in the College as well as the School of Business Administration.

Rather than allow the wide range of freedom in the 58 semester hours contained in the various elective categories, we require that all our majors:

1- complete two units of twelve semester hours each from the following list:

anthropology	economics
political science	psychology
sociology	management
criminal justice	education
marketing	military science

2- complete two units of twelve semester hours each from the following list:

English
history
foreign language
philosophy
religious studies
performing and visual arts

Advantages

The advantages we have enjoyed as a result of our structured breadth requirements are in two areas. 1) Graduates are better prepared to enter the job market; and, 2) Other academic departments are visibly affected which results in their "caring" about our future.

Student Advantages:

1) Graduates are better prepared for the job market. When our students enter the job market they offer a solid 36 hour major plus four firm blocs in other selected, cognate areas. Feedback from our alumni indicates that they feel our bloc system has been influential in permitting them to compete successfully with graduates from programs which fulfilled breadth requirements by the more traditional "cafeteria" method of selection.

2) The Department of Communication Arts produces the most liberally educated graduates in the University. Most departments in the university require 15 hours for a minor. Since all our majors must complete four 12 hour blocs, it is a simple task to extend one or more blocs to a minor. The great majority of our majors graduate with at least one minor. It is even possible for a Communication Arts student to complete all other requirements and four academic minors within the framework of the minimum 120 semester hours required for graduation.

Political Advantages:

The campus political benefit of this program--while secondary to educational rationale but impossible to ignore--is that other academic Departments see and feel the impact of our program on theirs. Obviously whether or not a bloc structure is employed, all those elective hours will go to other departments. The advantage to the bloc system, however, is that all those student credit hours are not scattered but concentrated and, thus, easily quantified and communicated.

The visibility of the impact can be demonstrated by pointing out that during the current academic year, Communication Arts majors fulfilling their

bloc requirements have contributed the following student credit hour totals to the designated academic departments:

English	1450 SCH	criminal justice	252 SCH
marketing	1159 SCH	foreign languages	168 SCH
history	1092 SCH	religion	100 SCH
performing & visual arts	722 SCH	education	84 SCH
management	621 SCH	economics	51 SCH
psychology	604 SCH	military science	51 SCH
sociology-anthropology	453 SCH	philosophy	33 SCH
political science	285 SCH		

The end result of such visibility is what we perceive to be a sound political position with other academic departments. What follows is a list of specific results generated by our bloc system:

1) A genuine concern from other departments to meet the needs of our majors. A variety of course offerings in other departments are targeted for our students. We enjoy the unique position of being the servee as well as the server.

2) A genuine concern for the future health of our Department. I often find that chairs of other departments are as concerned about our freshman numbers each year as they are their own. Our reliance on each other for survival has created a true collegial atmosphere.

3) Our students become familiar contributors to other academic programs. Because our students take blocs of courses in other departments, they become aware and appreciative of those programs. Many of our students may change majors or extend a bloc to a minor or even a double major. Because our students take blocs of courses in other departments, they become familiar to faculty in these

departments. Such familiarity leads to a greater campus wide awareness of and appreciation for our program and students.

Conclusion

Such a curricular model as described is not without disadvantages. Perhaps the most obvious is that such structure and lack of flexibility in a program is counter to the campus trends of the early 70's. Students are often less than enthusiastic when they first encounter the requirements. They frequently must be "won over." Testimonials from our graduates and a clear explanation of rationale have been successful to date.

The program described is not necessarily new--many institutions may be doing it without realizing it. The program may be impossible to implement in some institutions. Basically what has been described is a plan to provide a truly broad based preparation for Communication students. The plan has a significant utilitarian side effect in that it enables Departments of Communication to use their most valuable resource--student numbers--to enhance their bargaining position on campus and thus to help ensure their political survival at home.